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A GROUPING PLAN CAPITALIZING ON THE INDIVIDUALIZED READING APPROACH.

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A VARIETY OF ARRANGEMENTS, ACTIVITIES, AND GROUPING POSSIBILITIES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM USING THE INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAM (IRP) ARE PRESENTED. SEVERAL MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAM ARE MENTIONED, ESPECIALLY THE NOTION THAT CLASS SUBGROUPS ARE NOT PERMISSIBLE WITHIN THE IRP STRUCTURE AND THAT THE TEACHER-PUPIL CONFERENCE IS THE ONLY KIND OF INTERACTION BETWEEN TEACHER AND PUPIL IN THIS METHOD OF INSTRUCTION. IT IS STRESSED THAT CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION MUST FACILITATE TEACHING AND BE FLEXIBLE, AND THAT QUIET, INDEPENDENT WORK HABITS MUST BE TAUGHT. THE FOLLOWING POSSIBILITIES FOR CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION ARE DISCUSSED--(1) TEACHER TO TOTAL CLASS WHICH INCLUDES, CLASS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING SILENT READING TIME AND BOOK SHARING BY ONE PUPIL WITH TOTAL CLASS, (2) SUBGROUPING WITHIN THE TOTAL CLASS ACCORDING TO READING LEVELS, ACTIVITIES, PARTICULAR SKILLS TO BE TAUGHT, OR TYPES OF BOOKS READ, AND (3) THE TEACHER-PUPIL CONFERENCE. THIS ADDRESS WAS PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION (12TH, MAY 5, 1967). (RH)

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INTRODUCTION

The following statement by one seventh grade teacher on the issue of grouping in the classroom is remarkably insightful:

> "I, personally, like an individual, group, and whole-class organization depending on the learning situation. Time is precious -- never more so than those fleeting minutes allotted to each class. The important thing is to have something "happen". It is dangerous to set patterns for an approach to teaching. Whereas the youngster feels security in an established schedule, the greatest danger is a development of detached boredom. The "best way" is the way that leads to an individual involvement."

Truly, little more needs to be said. However, an effort will be made to show specifically how the ideas so succinctly expressed relate to the Individualized Reading Program.

In the Individualized Reading Program, a variety of arrangements and organizations are used within the classroom. The watchword is flexibility. Grouping patterns must not become rigid. There are several important interactions between teacher and pupil or pupils. Other secondary interactions occur between and among pupils themselves when they work as partners or in friendship groups. In Individualized Reading, as the name implies, the primary interaction is a one-to-one relationship between teacher and pupil. Typically this occurs during the individual conference and is the heart of the program. But certainly this does not preclude other arrangements.

The misconception persists that the teacher-pupil conference is the only kind of interaction between teacher and pupils in individualized reading. To the contrary, frequently the teacher will work with class sub-groups. In addition there are numerous occasions during the Individualized Reading Program when the teacher works with the whole class. Our intent is to examine arrangements in some detail. But first something must be said about the importance of independence and self-reliance as displayed by pupils.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENCE

The success of any reading program and the type of classroom organization which underlies it is a function of the degree of independence exhibited by the children. Certainly self-direction is particularly important to individualized reading. To succeed with individualized reading the teachers must help each child attain the highest degree of self reliance possible. The goal must be for each child to work quietly, carefully, conscientiously, and consistently, with a sense of his own purpose and direction. Upon completing one task he must know how to move on to the next. He must learn to choose wisely from among several alternate tasks.

The following chart exemplifies activities suitable for Quiet Work Time in the First Grade.

QUIET WORK TIME

Use a soft voice.

Do your work without disturbing others.

Finish one job and go on to another job.

You can
do a number paper
draw a picture
write a story
paint at easel
look at a book
read a book
play with blocks
work a puzzle (game)
play a story
play in the playhouse

The teacher soon realizes that she must take as much time at the beginning of the school year to teach independence and self-reliance as she does to teach reading or arithmetic or anything else. By so doing she will have taken a long step forward toward guaranteeing positive results in the days ahead. Taking the extra few minutes to teach quiet independent work habits is crucial. The Individualized Reading Program cannot be truly successful without this ingredient. Many teachers fail on this factor.

CLASSROOM ORGANICATION: TEACHER TO TOTAL CLASS

During the Individualized Reading Program the teacher works with the total class as a unit on numerous occasions and for a variety of reasons. The opening moments of the Quiet or Silent Reading Time are most important. Here atmosphere is established, settling down is accomplished, directions are given. Each reader is reminded of the tasks he must accomplish.

A chart may be used for this purpose:

QUIET READING TIME

Have Conference
Read Silently
Select Book(s)
Write Summary
Study Vocabulary
Read to Partner

All must understand that these are the legitimate activities one engages in during the Quiet Reading Time. Some will need a good deal more "instructional guidance" than will others prior to fitting neatly into this pattern. The gossips, wanderers and time wasters will have to learn that there are better uses for their time. Daily reminders are necessary for a while.

This way of working is markedly different in structure consequently many pupils are unaccustomed to it. Much more self direction and self motivation are needed here than in the more typical three group patterns.

There are always a few who will need frequent direction prior to learning these new patterns of behavior in reading time. Those lacking self direction and independence will need more "instructional guidance", more - firm direction. The teacher needs patience and persistance. It is a wise move for the teacher to spend a few moments with the class as a whole prior to becoming involved with individual or small group instruction. The dividends are worth it.

<u>The Total Class Conference Following Silent Reading Time</u>

Through the personal conference the teacher really learns about the children as readers and about the books they choose to read. The richness of the personal contact makes the conference uniquely vital. There is so much to talk about, so many books; there is always the desire to prolong the conference. But always there are so many children, there is never enough time to talk sufficiently with each child. Many truly interesting conferences have to be cut short.

To augment suggestions given to individual children during individual conferences, a brief evaluation period can be held with the total class at the conclusion of the daily Silent Reading Time. Here, as with the individual conference, the artistry of teaching is exhibited through the questions asked. Several suggested questions are listed which can be used effectively to prime the discussion. The teacher must realize that on any given day a different particular combination of questions could be used.

1. Did you have a good reading period today? Did you read well? Did you get a lot done?
2. Did you read better today than yesterday?
3. Were you able to concentrate today on your silent reading?
4. Did the ideas in the book hold your attention? Did you have the feeling of moving right along with them?
5. Did you have the feeling of wanting to go ahead faster to find out what happened? Were you constantly moving ahead to get to the next good part?
6. Was it hard for you to keep your mind on what you were reading today?
7. Were you bothered by others or by outside noises?
8. Could you keep the ideas in your book straight in your mind?
9. Did you get mixed up in any place? Did you have to go back and straighten yourself out?
10. Were there words you did not know? How did you figure them out?
11. What did you do when you got to the good parts? Did you read faster or slower?
12. Were you always counting to see how many pages you had to go? Were you wondering how long it would take you to finish?
13. Were you kind of hoping that the book would go on and on - that it would not really end?

By generating a discussion about the nature, quality and quantity of reading accomplished by the class during Silent Reading Time, the teacher helps to build a concept within each child about the kind of reader he is becoming and of what he needs to do to improve his own reading. Thus the development of the self image, the concept of what the good reader does emerges. This concept of the good reader, and what one must do to become one, is the foundation of improved reading performance by each child. Consequently this evaluation session, while brief, can be invaluable. It should occur almost daily.

Book Sharing By One Pupil With Total Class

Book Sharing Time is second in importance only to Quiet Reading Time. What are often rather routine and desultory descriptions by children of books read can eventually produce some near riots by several eager readers who want to be next in line to get their hands on a particularly popular book. True, some children never learned how to sell a book or make it seem exciting. But many do. Sharing a good book can be their big moment and many children will be quite impatient while awaiting their turn to tell about an unusually good book.

Using a printed guide sheet can make the book sharing period much more vital and dynamic. It may be posted on the chalk board or on a bulletin board. One teacher's chart reads as follow:

Hi! I'm Mr. Book

To share Me Tell:

1. My Name.
2. Who wrote me.
3. If I'm a good book.
4. About a very good part.
5. About a very good picture.
6. Then read a little bit so people can hear some of me.

It may take some persistent effort on the part of some children to learn to follow this form and yet make their book sound exciting to others. But it can be done. Emphasis is placed on practicing a part which, when read aloud to the group, stimulates in others a desire to read the book. Frequently during the individual conference the discussion centers on book sharing. The steps are reviewed with the child. Some have to be reminded to practice the part which will be read orally to the group. Some have to be urged to practice and for a few, practice must be required. But stress is placed on the value of fluent oral reading of the part of a book to be shared with the whole class. They are keenly aware that the quality of oral reading may determine how well they sell their book to other readers.

SUBGROUPING WITHIN TOTAL CLASS SITUATIONS

The notion continues that class subgroups are not permissible within IRP structure nor that it is customary for the teacher to work with subgroups. The fact that stable permanent ability groups are not used may be the source of confusion. There are however a variety of other class subgroupings which are frequently employed by teachers who use IRP.

Class subgroups can be organized along many different dimensions other than reading levels. Teachers may call groups together according to the particular reading skills or activities to be taught. At other times discussion groups may be formed according to types or classifications of books read. Such discussions can be based on large general classifications or can be more specific in nature. For example one time discussion can center on factual or informational

books, the next day on fanciful stories. Specifically invitations can be issued to all children with animal - people (biography) - funny (humor) - adventure - mystery - family situation - science or whatever type of book the teacher designates. Once again the reading circle is formed. But in this instance each child has a different book - a book he has chosen to read. The common element is the type of book being read not the relative performance level of the reader.

The pattern of questioning is not highly structured but emanates from the kind of material being read and from the interest of the children in their books. The following imaginary discussion is based on a small group discussion where each child has read a fanciful or imaginary book.

Teacher: "Each of you has a book which is imaginative, don't you? Some of the books are really fantastic, like Jean's Dr. Suess book." "David, is your book more like reporting -- telling what happened and how it happened or is it quite imaginative."

David: "Boy, it's way out!

(Several other children are queried along the dimension of relatively factual to highly imaginative. The books vary with regard to this quality; the teacher emphasizes the reality-fantasy continuum.)

Teacher: "How do we get books which are fanciful? Where do these ideas come from?"

Debbie: "From the author."

Teacher: "Yes, but where does the writer get these ideas?"

Ken: "In his head."

Teacher: "Yes, in his mind; he makes them up. Can we say that these books are really true; do the things in them really take place?"

Children: "No!"

Ann: "Most of the things in my book couldn't happen."

Teacher: "Can we say these ideas are real ideas?"

Albert: "Ya!" "Some guy thought 'em up. He had 'em in his head. He got them from somewhere."

Teacher: "But there is a difference between telling what actually happened and telling about something we just imagine happens."

Children in Chorus: "Yes." "But they sure make some wonderful reading," adds Robin.

Teacher: "Now I want each of you to find in your book one or two places where the ideas are most fantastic; where the writer has told something that just couldn't happen. We'll see who has a part in his book with the most imagination."

(Children search for places in their books examplifying the greatest degrees of fantasy. Turns are given to various children to read the fanciful parts; following several renditions according to limits of time, a decision is made regarding the greatest display of imaginative power by the various authors. Two or three children hold out for their particular book being most fanciful."

This abbreviated and to some extent simulated discussion is intended to show how fundamental qualities basic to reading comprehension can be developed through group discussion. The teacher, by observing reactions of various children, can add to her catalog of items about each child's reading. Does the child respond to the finer

discriminations within the dimension of reality -- fantasy? A teacher must observe these responses to know truly the child as a reader. All the cherished values of group interaction can be realized within this situation.

Similar dialogues could have been presented for a variety of qualities found between the covers but below the surface print of hundreds of children's books. Several more important qualities are:

Humor -- extend understanding of what constitutes funniness and humor.

Biography -- fidelity with which the qualities and characteristics of central person are developed. Is there an honest portrayal of positive and negative elements?

Mystery -- manner by which the writer developed the aura of mystery and extent to which situations are contrived or natural.

Family Situation -- exploration of validity of author in recording behavior and reactions of persons within the story to critical choice points. (How would the children who are reading react in similar conflicting situations?)

It is vital that teachers develop a facility for asking questions and generating discussion. The trick is to use questions which orient the reader to the nature and type of literature - i.e. fantasy or humor - what makes it funny, or with mystery - what makes it mysterious and so on. The climax is to lead the discussion to a comparison of the extent or degree to which the underlying quality is present. By having each child find the most imaginative part in

his book comparisons can be made. After several children have shared their own fanciful parts a decision can be made regarding whose is least realistic. Insight is gained relative to types and degrees of imagination. Such insights are basic to improved reading performance.

The summation of responses given by children over a series of group conferences becomes highly revealing. The generalized impressions the teacher gains about a particular child can be refined and verified within the scope of the individual teacher-pupil conference. Thus the group conference is a valuable part of the total classroom arrangement.

Skills Subgroups

Instructional groups are frequently formed to meet the particular needs of particular pupils. Teachers notice, as a result of accumulated observation and records, that some children need additional help with one or more particular word or contextual skill. To give them this particular instruction a temporary subgroup will be formed.

Skill groups may be formed when two or more children in a classroom need the same kind of extra assistance in order to progress in reading with greater ease and fewer tensions. To organize skills groups of this sort, the teacher must be alert to each child's responses and reactions in the various other reading situations. She must constantly be on the alert for barriers which prevent the child from reading fluently and efficiently.

Once grouped for instruction on a particular skill, the teacher continues with the group until the particular instructional goals

have been accomplished. Then it is dismissed, restructured or reorganized with another set of children and a new teaching objective.

Teachers frequently refer to this classroom arrangement as subgrouping by invitation. Once the lesson has been announced, all those who feel so inclined, join the instructional setting. The teacher of course, offers a special invitation to a selected few. And she makes sure that they accept. But others are welcome. By careful and constant referral to her checklist of skills, the teacher can visualize rather readily which basic reading skills she needs to teach and which children to invite.

CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT: THE INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCE

The teacher-pupil conference is a highly personal matter; thus inevitably it is an expression of the two persons involved--the teacher and the pupil. The personality of each colors the situation and in essence determines the nature of each conference. No one can prescribe exactly what the teacher should say or do. No one should try. The teachers personality must, of course, dominate and determine the pattern and tone for every conference. She is the constant factor--she is always there. On the other hand, the child's personality is the independent variable - the unpredictable ingredient - which makes each conference a unique and highly individual teaching--learning experience. The child's reactions and responses to the books and materials being read become the focal point of the teacher-pupil conference - the object of the teacher's observations.

The intent here, then is to present generalized patterns which typically occur during conference time. Hopefully, models or types can be established to aid teachers in developing skill and deftness in handling the conference situations; yet cautioning each teacher once more that she must be the prime mover of the conference. She must be instrumental in developing it into a successful activity. Her art and power of asking questions and responding instantly and intelligently to the child's reactions with more questions is the key to success. It's her responsibility to initiate the action; most children will take off from the stimulus which she provides.

The conference time should not be a time for merely assuring oneself that the child has read and remembered every part of every page of his book. Undoubtedly the worst command that a teacher can give in conference time is "Tell me about your book," or phrased differently, "Tell me everything you can remember about your book." Nor is the conference the time to elicit answers to a long list of factual questions about every part of each book. The conference time is not the place where the teacher needs to sit with an individual child and listen to him read long passages orally; or to record the many mistakes he makes by seeing how many words he does not know. By contrast the conference time must give the child an opportunity to reveal his strength as a reader through his personal responses to the book which he, himself, has chosen to read. The teacher's task is to assess the reader rather than the content of the book which has been read.

Much has been reported in the literature on the individual conference. For additional specific helps the reader is referred to material wherein the art of skillfull questioning has been deacribed. (2) (3) (4) (5).

SUMMARY

The point to be remembered and too frequently forgotten pertains to instructional procedures on the one hand and classroom organization on the other. First of all the teacher teaches; she arranges the classroom to facilitate the teaching. To do otherwise is to reverse the order. Class organization is a consequence of instructional patterns. The rigid arrangement so frequently associated with the three ability group arrangement must be avoided.

Successful teaching means fitting the classroom organization to instructional goals. Flexibility shown through utilizing many different organizational arrangements is the answer.

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